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ABSTRACT

Brinkmanship behaviors challenge the authority of a social system while trying to avoid, usually through the use of humor, the sanctions that would normally be provoked. This study investigated the validity and use of short scenarios portraying various teachers challenging policy in different ways as a strategy for measuring perceptions of these behaviors. The subjects were 78 actively employed teachers. They were asked to indicate how well they felt each of four adjectives--obedient, defiant, confronting, and radical--described the teacher portrayed in each scenario. The results suggest that research in this area requires further elaboration of the theory defining the types of brinkmanship and additional improvement of brinkmanship perceptions. (Author/JD)

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Strategies for Measuring Perceptions of Teacher Behaviors

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ABSTRACT

Brinkmanship behaviors are behaviors which challenge the authority of a social system while trying to avoid, usually through the use of humor, the sanctions that would normally be provoked. This study investigated the use of short stories portraying various teachers as a strategy for measuring perceptions of these behaviors. The subjects were 78 actively employed teachers. The results suggest that further research in this area requires further elaboration of the theory defining the types of brinkmanship and also additional improvement of measures of brinkmanship perceptions.

Researchers have recently become interested in a class of behaviors which Licata and Willower (1975b) have termed "brinkmanship behaviors." As defined by Stapleton, Thompson, Frankiewicz, and Croft (1979, p. 286), the construct refers to "teacher behavior which challenges the authority system of the school while avoiding its negative sanctions." Licata and Willower (1975a) have suggested that three categories of brinkmanship behaviors can be differentiated from each other on the basis of how much compliance with authority the behaviors reflect.

The most compliant form of brinkmanship, subversive obedience, "is rule obeying behavior in which someone follows the letter but not the spirit of a rule, or the person complies in an exaggerated way in order to use the organization's rules to its own disadvantage" (Melancon, 1981, p. 38). "'Tightroping' is neither rule obeying nor rule disobeying behavior, it is a behavior which exploits rule vagueness as a means to avoid organizational sanctions" (Melancon & Thompson, 1981a, p. 5, emphasis added). Finally, "rule disobeying behavior that will result in negative sanction, unless adequately protected through humor and satire, is termed boundary testing" (Frankiewicz & Thompson, 1979, p. 2, emphasis added).

Stapleton (1978) has developed a series of short scenarios which portray various teacher brinkmanship behaviors. These scenarios have been used by a number of researchers in substantive inquiry, notably including work by Melancon (1981) and Melancon and Thompson (1981a). Unfortunately, the validity of these scenarios has not been conclusively established, although several validity studies have been conducted (Melancon & Thompson, 1981b; Thompson & Stapleton, 1979/80). The study reported here was conducted to generate additional information regarding the validity of Stapleton's (1978) scenarios.

The subjects (n = 78) in the study were actively employed teachers. The preponderance of the subjects were females. Each of Stapleton's (1978) six scenarios, i.e., two scenarios per brinkmanship type, were presented to the subjects in random order. At the time of the study the subjects were not aware of the types of brinkmanship or of which type of brinkmanship each scenario was intended to measure.

The subjects were asked to indicate how well they felt each of four adjectives (obedient, defiant, confronting, and radical) described the teacher portrayed in each scenario. In order to maximize reliability, responses were collected using an unnumbered graphic scale (Thompson, 1981). Table 1

presents the descriptive statistics derived from analysis of these data.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE.

A discriminant analysis was conducted in order to determine whether the ratings differentiated the various types of portrayed behaviors. Although four statistically significant ($p < .05$) discriminant functions were identified, the first function contained 73.2% of the information provided by the four functions. Consequently, only this function was interpreted. Standardized function and structure coefficients are presented in Table 2. The centroid of each scenario on the function is presented in Table 3.

INSERT TABLES 2 & 3 ABOUT HERE.

The Table 2 results suggest that the adjective, "confronting," is the most helpful in differentiating the six scenarios. This finding is important theoretically; the result suggests that the compliance continuum is primarily defined by "activism" rather than by the perceived "rightness" or "goodness" of the behaviors. The Table 3 results indicate that the function is primarily useful for differentiating the two tightroping scenarios and the first subversive obedience scenario from the second boundary testing scenario and the second subversive obedience

scenario.

These results provide mixed evidence regarding the validity of the six scenarios. For example, in Table 1, the six scenarios are correctly ordered by the "obedient" ratings, with the dramatic exception of the second subversive obedience scenario. It is interesting to note that the two tightroping scenarios, as indicated by the Table 1 results, are perceived as the most "confronting" of the scenarios, although they are both located near the middle of the compliance continuum conceptualized by Licata and Willower (1975a).

The results in this and in other studies (Melancon & Thompson, 1981b; Thompson & Stapleton, 1979/80) suggest that two developments must occur before further progress can be made in investigating perceptions of teacher brinkmanship. First, the similarities and differences among the three types of brinkmanship need to be more completely conceptualized. Specifically, the psychological meaning of the compliance continuum needs to be more adequately defined. This refinement can now be partially supported by previous empirical study.

Second, once the types of brinkmanship behaviors have been more completely defined, the iterative process of developing and validiting scenarios must be continued.

Stapleton (1978) very carefully developed the initial measures in this area. Further research, however, requires that additional measures be developed as substitutes or compliments for the measures which are currently available.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

(n=78)

Compliance Continuum	Scenario		Adjective: Obedient	Defiant	Confronting	Radical
Obeying	Subversive Obedience	1	7.3(3.9)	4.3(3.4)	7.2(4.0)	3.6(3.1)
		2	2.8(2.8)	9.0(3.7)	4.2(3.7)	8.0(4.0)
Neither	Tightroping	1	3.6(3.1)	6.0(3.4)	10.6(2.0)	4.7(3.2)
		2	6.2(4.0)	5.7(3.7)	9.4(3.1)	4.1(3.2)
Disobeying	Boundary Testing	1	2.4(2.7)	9.1(3.7)	9.8(3.0)	5.9(3.9)
		2	1.7(1.7)	8.4(3.9)	3.9(3.3)	6.4(4.0)

NOTE: Means not in parentheses; standard deviations in parentheses.

Table 2

Function and Structure Coefficients

Adjective	Function Coefficient	Structure Coefficient
Obedient	-.43	-.44
Defiant	.26	.37
Confronting	-.85	-.72
Radical	.30	.35

Table 3

Group Centroids

Scenario		Centroid
Subversive Obedience	1	-0.7
	2	+1.4
Tightroping	1	-0.9
	2	-1.0
Boundary Testing	1	-0.2
	2	+1.4